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SUBJECT: GREEK ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE: DISILLUSIONMENT

WITH AKP GROWS

¶11. (SBU) Summary. During a January 22 courtesy call by Ambassador Jeffrey, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I requested the Ambassador's help in addressing the Patriarchate's problems with the government of Turkey (GOT). He expressed his best wishes for President Obama and his hope that the new administration would continue to promote good relations between Turkey and the United States. Commenting on the Patriarchate's initial high hopes for change after the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) took power in 2002, he said the Patriarchate was "a little bit disappointed" by the ruling party's failure to follow through with reforms. The Patriarchate is still unable to open Halki Seminary, must operate without a legal personality, and is concerned about the small pool of candidates - limited by the GOT - for the next Patriarchal election. In the face of these challenges, the Patriarch said he remains optimistic in part because of the recent appointment of AKP MP Egemen Bagis to the position of State Minister for EU Affairs. End Summary.

¶12. (SBU) The Patriarch expressed his best wishes for President Obama and his hope that the new administration would continue to promote good relations between Turkey and the United States. Commending the U.S. for providing a positive example to be imitated around the world, he also thanked the U.S. administration for its attentiveness and support and for understanding the importance of the Patriarchate. The Patriarch stressed that the "civilized world needs to keep the Patriarchate in this place" and said he counted on the Ambassador to continuously remind the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the problems the Patriarchate faces. He noted that the Patriarchate had also expected great things from the GOT after the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002 because they are close to religion and would better understand the Patriarchate's situation and needs. "But now we are a little bit disappointed." The Patriarchate is unable to reacquire "mazbut" (seized) foundations despite the amendment of the Foundations Law in 2008, cannot reopen Halki, still does not have a legal personality, and faces a very small pool of eligible candidates under the GOT's current interpretation of how the Holy Synod can elect a new Patriarch. According to the Patriarch, the Patriarchate has no avenue for dialogue with the GOT in which to put forth its concerns and proposals. He cited the example of a proposed mixed commission of the Ministry of Education with representatives from the Patriarchate. Minister of Education Huseyin Celik demurred, stating that such a commission was for foreigners and the Greek Orthodox in Turkey were part of the Turkish family.

¶13. (SBU) The Patriarch said he cannot understand why the GOT "insists so much on not reopening Halki." He related a conversation with Celik who said he did not see any legal problems with the reopening of the seminary and suggested that reopening Halki "may come soon with so much progress in

the country." The best proof to the world of Turkey's tolerance would be the opening of Halki, the Patriarch said, and entreated the Ambassador to help in reopening Halki. The Ambassador said he will do all possible to support the Patriarchate and suggested that the Patriarchate also press the GOT to solve these concerns before Istanbul takes on the mantle of the European City of Culture in 2010.

¶4. (SBU) In the face of these challenges, the Patriarch said he remains optimistic in part because of the recent appointment of Istanbul AKP MP Egemen Bagis to the position of Minister to EU Affairs. According to him, Bagis has a better understanding of the Patriarchate's problems and is better poised to affect change with the EU. Specifically, he said the Turkish administration needs to understand that the Patriarchate is not a threat to Turkey, but instead a privilege. The Patriarch said he was hosting Bagis for dinner at his residence that evening to further deepen their discussion of these issues.

Wiener